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ABSTRACT

A strategy for English second language instruction in the Greek schools of Cyprus at the elementary and secondary level is described. Central to the strategy is assignment of student projects, either individual or small-group, integrating independent language learning and use of research and planning skills. An introductory section presents the instructional rationale for such an assignment. Methodology is then outlined in six steps: preliminary idea-gathering and consideration of potential subjects; planning of the project's structure; research; analysis of data and drawing of conclusions; presentation in the form of an oral and/or written report; and evaluation. A number of related issues are discussed separately, including time factors and motivation in project planning and completion, selection of appropriate topics, the teacher's role in the project phases and aspects, the corresponding role of the student, and special considerations in small group work. A sample project evaluation form is included. (MSE)

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THE PROJECTS STRATEGY IN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

by A.P. Papandreou

(Paper Presented at the 7th IATEFL Conference in Cyprus; April 11, 1993)

The purpose of this paper is the presentation of a concise, yet complete, system in formulating the projects strategy as applied in the teaching of English to speakers of other languages. The presentation is descriptive in nature, reflecting experience gained in teaching English in the Greek Schools of Cyprus.

DEFINITION

A project, as applied in teaching English is, primarily, a language learning endeavor through which students make most of the necessary decisions and work mostly on their own. They collect information from a variety of sources and by collating and analyzing their data, they enable themselves to present a product, usually in the form of a paper, a research paper, research results, conclusions, a model, or a combination of these.

PURPOSE

The purpose of a project is to help the student (or a group of students) in working with a teacher and/or fellow students, and in independently formulating objectives and developing a technique and mode of action, in pursuing intended learning outcomes, as planned in the TESOL curriculum and/or designed at the specific instructional setting. In so acting, students consult with the English teacher, and take into consideration the English text(s), and the policies of the English department and/or the school.

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CONCEPT AND APPROACHES

The projects strategy is concerned with approaches to curriculum and instruction, where the indirect strategy to teaching is employed, and emphasis is placed both on summative or product as well as on formative or process evaluations.

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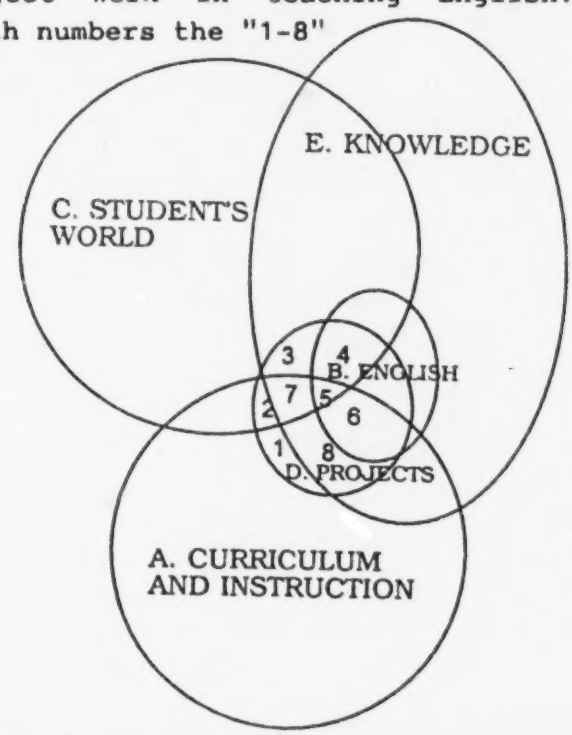
In perceiving the concept of projects, as it is functionally defined and described here, and elsewhere, the comparison to other educational terms is employed. Basic educational terms, such as curriculum, instruction, knowledge, student, and language are adopted in order to signify meaning by pointing out relationships in using the circular shape, and by varying the area and placement of each individual circle, as in model 1.

Model 1, "Projects in Teaching English", portrays the several inter-relationships acting upon and from curriculum and instruction in order to form an indirect approach in teaching English to speakers of other languages. According to this model students have the opportunity to work on subjects from the formal and/or the hidden curriculum, with topics from their world or from outside, in order to pursue English language learning from the domain of established and/or emerging knowledge.

As it is portrayed through circle "D", of the model "Projects in Teaching English", there are eight approaches to applying project work in teaching English. These are designated with numbers the "1-8"



Model 1. Projects in Teaching English

Numbers 1, 2, 3, 7, 8 describe projects that could be assigned in the teaching of English as well as in other subjects and modes of organizing curriculum content. However, numbers 4, 5, and 6 signify what is pursued most through the TESOL curriculum and the projects strategy.

The first group of project activities include assignments directly related to curricular and instructural objectives, but outside the domain of the student's world and knowledge; subjects on intended learning outcomes resulting from the student's world, but unrelated to the established knowledge of English ("2"); projects undertaken by students from their own world regardless of their inclusion in the curriculum and the planned instructional aims ("3"); projects resulting from the students world and promoting curricular, but not instructional purposes in the field of teaching English ("7"), and projects promoting curricular and instructional objectives but, outside the domains of teaching English and the world of students ("8").

The projects applied most in teaching English are the ones portrayed through the dotted areas of the model in the circles students world, knowledge, English, and curriculum and instruction, and numbered "4", "5" and "6". Although all the other types of projects are useful both in education, in general, and in the teaching of English, specifically, numbers "4", "5" and "6" are treated here as major techniques of applying indirect teaching in the field of English.

Number "4" is a description of projects that come from the students world, and promote learning in English. They were neither planned in English nor intended as learning outcomes, and, therefore, constitute a part of the hidden curriculum. Such projects may, for example, deal with topics whose vocabulary is not usually dealt with in regular English teaching. This type of project is illustrated by topics such as "an operation", "the construction of a ship", and "the family of insects". Number "5" is the most common and probably most desired type of project applied in elementary and secondary education. Projects of this type are based on the student's world, promote English language learning, and are included in the curriculum guide for teaching English. Topics

of this type may include individual presentations on subjects like "an analysis of the present tense in English and Greek," "a comparison of greetings in British and American English", "touring my country", and "my school as part of the educational system".

Topics such as the above may constitute a part of the official curriculum, the instructional objectives and the selected content and may also be part of student interests. This type of projects is especially useful in education, because they promote and complement classroom teaching.

Number "6" is also a very interesting and recommended approach to teaching. These projects promote learning through approved curricular and instructional developments and help students to acquire behavior outside their immediate world. Assignments in this domain might include topics such as "the city of New York", "A report from the BBC news", and "a conversation with a Londoner visiting my country".

METHODOLOGY

The projects strategy, as viewed in this paper, has a dual nature: First it is an approach to promoting the strategy of indirect teaching in English and second, it is a technique or method of teaching in itself.

Every project is the result of coordinated actions and activities undertaken by a student or a group of students. These activities and actions, although they may take almost any form, are organized into a process, the complete form of which, even though not always followed, consists of the following six steps: (1) Preparation, (2) planning, (3) research, (4) conclusions and/or results, (5) presentation, and (6) evaluation.

Preparation refers to the first step of completing a project. At this time the teacher introduces the idea of projects and uses techniques of student motivation to move towards this direction. Students have the chance to discuss with their teacher the subject and ask for further information, and then they are given time to think and be involved in preliminary activities, if necessary.

Planning comes after a student has made the decision to follow this mode to English language learning. During this step student decisions are confirmed by the teacher, and planning starts on the various aspects of the process. Topics such as the statement of the problem or the subject of investigation, information sources, the mode of collecting and analyzing information, the presentation technique, evaluation, and individual assignments to members of teams, in cases of collaborative efforts, are discussed during this step.

The research step is centrally related to the strategy. During this phase students individually or in groups, in order to pursue their objectives, collect materials and information from books, journals, libraries, maps, and persons.

Some very useful techniques that can be used as instruments, at this stage, are a) the interview, b) the observation, and c) the questionnaire. The interview as a research technique refers to the collection of information from certain individuals, who are considered, by the students, to be able to illuminate the problem by saying what they know about a subject. Students assigned to conduct interviews know that they have to prepare, their questions in advance, and if necessary tape the entire conversation.

Observation as a technique of collecting data is conducted by students, who observe certain events or, interactions, which they record.

The questionnaire as a research technique is prepared by students and then distributed to certain individuals for a response. The questionnaire could be written in the respondent's native language, if necessary, but, in that case the results must be written and of course presented in English. Students in the same class, in the same school, in the same city and others may be requested to respond. Teachers are also expected to participate, if asked to do so.

The analysis of data and the drawing of conclusions is one of the methodology steps, and it refers to the analysis of the records kept by students during the previous steps. This analysis may refer to statistical analysis or may include

the recordings of information from printed materials in order to reach a conclusion on the subject.

Once a student or a group of students have gone through the previous steps, they are ready to present their work to the teacher, or to their group, or to the students of the entire class. The following are suggested modes of presentation: (a) Oral report, (b) oral report accompanied with illustrations and pictures, and (c) written report in the form of a paper, term paper, research paper, and paper for publication in the school journal or elsewhere.

Evaluation is a necessary step both in teaching as well as in adopting this particulár technique to processing curricular and instructional objectives. The teacher, in evaluating a project, needs to (a) indicate nothing on the paper per se, (b) always bear in mind the particular instructional objective, as well as the purpose of undertaking such project work, and (c) understand that the teacher is not the only project evaluator, (d) know that process or formative evaluation is at least an important as product, or summative evaluation, and (e) remind himself/herself that this is often an extra, usually not required, assignment on the part of the student.

Some factors which may be taken into consideration, during the evaluation stage, are the student's attempts, creativity, use of sources, potential versus the student's performance, and presentation performance. In following the project method in teaching English to elementary and secondary school students, one may accept it is not the product, or the appropriate research findings altogether, that only counts, but it is the English language intercourse and student interactions needed to complete the assignment which are considered as well.

In general, project evaluation tends to be positive, presenting the setting of rewarding student effort, both objectively but subjectively as well, applying, but also disregarding, norm-referenced or criterion referenced approaches to student evaluation in TESOL.

An evaluation instrument, for use in this type of work, is presented in Figure 1, "Project Evaluation Instrument". According to this instrument, students are graded with letters from the alphabet. Grade "A" means excellent work, "B" very good work, and grade "OK" means acceptable work. In case the evaluator or evaluators feel that none of the above grades corresponds to student performance, they may use verbal evaluations in the form of comments in the appropriate space. It is anticipated that these comments include positive feedback in the form of encouragement, suggestions for improvement, in this or in another project, and rewards at least for energy and time invested.

TIME

Time is a crucial factor in this activity. The organization of time is decided upon an agreement between the teacher and the student on the basis of the nature of the project and the availability of time for the teacher but especially for the student.

It's a fact that this type of work requires a considerable amount of time, but this not, however, a reason to discourage teachers from such an approach in processing English learning objectives. It is known that time invested in this type of activity comes with rewards and several students are willing to accept and undertake such an endeavor.

In case the time barrier becomes a serious obstacle in convincing students to follow this mode to instruction, teachers should have in mind that students complete their most difficult assignments gladly, provided they are convinced, that what they are going to work on is worth the effort, and that the teacher has a genuine interest in supervising the several phases of the process.

It should also be made clear to students, it is not time consuming activities they are pursuing; It is active involvement in the process of learning English which is pursued; thus, the quality of their work should preceed over quantity. At the beginning of employing this method, the teacher is advised to suggest such projects, which are designed to produce fast results; this would reinforce student motives and keep student morale high.

PROJECT EVALUATION INSTRUMENT

Student's Name:

Project Title:

Date:

Evaluation Criteria	Performance		
1. Organization	A	B	OK
2. Creativity	A	B	OK
3. Effort	A	B	OK
4. Results	A	B	OK
5. Presentation	A	B	OK
6.	A	B	OK
7.	A	B	OK
8.	A	B	OK
9.	A	B	OK
10.	A	B	OK

Comments:

Recommendations:

Evaluator's Name/Signature:

Figure 1. Project Evaluation Instrument

TOPICS

Students select the topics of their projects by themselves, but also, in consultation with their teacher. The teacher may present a list of topics and ask the students to select one. He/she may also conduct a brainstorming session to collect ideas from the students. In any way, the teacher must have in mind that there is no lack of subjects which interest the student.

Some of the topics used in TESOL or suggested by English teachers are the following:

1. My dream town.
2. Animals.
3. An accident.
4. A country I visited or would like to visit.
5. My family at work.
6. A profession, e.g. teaching.
7. A story I've read.
8. A family of musical instruments.
9. The people of the Mediterranean, or Europe, or USA.
10. My world.
11. Architecture in my city.
12. Bussing.
13. Technology (in reference to a student interest).

The above stated topics in addition to several other, may present opportunities for individual work and pursuits or team work, where each topic is subdivided into smaller units and each student member is responsible for a portion of the effort.

TEACHER'S ROLE

Effective use of the projects approach to teaching English is based, to a considerable degree, on the teacher, whose efforts could reflect on student work. In case the teacher is committed to bringing language learning outcomes through this approach, he/she is going to communicate this message to students, and they are going to work towards this direction.

At the beginning, the teacher should use techniques of student motivation in order to set the learning and social

background for this type of work. At the same time, the teacher must be able to present and explain a thorough and detailed plan of action, so that students start following under teacher's guidance.

In general, the teacher's role in this method is partially described by the following parameters:

1. The teacher knows or helps the students to find out sources that may help them in project work.
2. He/she is himself/herself a source of information.
3. He/she is the coordinator of the entire process.
4. He/she is supportive to students especially to those at an insecure stage, using a positive approach and never applying criticism that may hurt the feelings of students.
5. She/he provides feedback. She/he expresses opinions and suggestions in order to help students get through the process.

Below, the above list is presented and expanded in Figure 2. "Teachers and Students Roles in Project Work".

	STUDENT	TEACHER
TOPIC	Selects topic	Describes parameters and suggests
OBJECTIVES	Sets final objectives	Helps in setting
PREPARATION	Directs	Advises on
PLANNING	Directs	Contributes to
TIME	Plans	Makes suggestions for
RESEARCH	Coordinates and implements	Observes, and/or facilitates
RESULTS	Analyzes	Observes
PRESENTATION	Performs	Member of audience in
EVALUATION	Participates	Provides feedback

Figure 2. Teachers' and Students' Role in Projects.

GROUP WORK

It was observed that small groups of students working together may produce a worthwhile project. This form of cooperative learning contributes not only to cognitive intended learning outcomes, but, also provides students the opportunity to learn working together, sharing views and problems, respecting each other's feelings, and developing group and social skills. These advantages of cooperative learning, however, are not the reason to force, or direct or redirect, everybody's energies towards this mode of implementing the curriculum without their free choice of acting likewise.

The teacher should be able to support either the individual or the group approach and let students follow the one they feel most comfortable with. She/he should be able to guide those who do not have strong feelings about the individual or group attempt and/or exhibit an interest for teacher input.

In a group effort all participants need to contribute something. They may work together on a single activity or they may decide to subdivide the project into English learning tasks, in which situation each member of the group is assigned one.

Below, there is a partial list of activities, which teachers or student teams may decide to assign to group members. The successful completion of these, by the individual members, could help the group assemble all of them into a whole and present it as agreed. Although not required or advised, students may decide to appoint a coordinator for this type of work. The following activities are suggested:

1. Collection of information and pictures.
2. Drawing or painting.
3. Map drawing.
4. Drawing of figures, models, diagrams and tables.
5. Poem writing.
6. Completion of a list.
7. Response to question
8. Posting letters.
9. Experimenting.
10. Guide preparation.
11. Role playing.
12. Accounting.

13. Invitation writing.
14. Recipe writing.
15. Setting rules and regulations.
16. Dialog and script writing.
17. Story writing and telling.
18. Collection and/or description of facts, information, and events.
19. Radio and/or TV program presentation.
20. Editing.
21. Questionnaire development.
22. Keeping dates/diary.
23. Interviewing.

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Viewing projects through curricular and instructional perspectives, it could be said that intended learning outcomes are promoted through the project approach and that this method is sensitive, and thus most productive. Some observations are the following:

1. Learning is the result of a student, rather than a teacher centered approach to instruction.
2. Certain models and approaches to instruction could be used like learning by doing, independent study, cooperative learning, brainstorming, role playing, discovery learning, discussion, team teaching, and cooperative learning.
3. Self-motivation is the key concept to success of this approach, thus time is saved for other teaching activities.
4. Setting curricular and instructional objectives may include all three domains, cognitive, affective, and psychomotor, at all levels, knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis.
5. Selecting language content is based to a high degree, on one of the most important factors of curricular planning, the student.
6. Learning resulting in such a setting is experiential in nature, and, thus, less easily forgotten than learning acquired through a standard routine classroom setting.
7. Students get satisfaction of a tangible product of their own, for which they can be proud.
8. Although the projects approach is very useful, certain drawbacks should be taken into consideration at the avoidance level. This approach should rarely be employed

as the sole method of instruction of a course, as, among other reasons, it is time consuming. It is suggested that it is frequently employed as a supplementary method to other prevailing strategies of direct or indirect teaching.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be said that selecting the project technique to implement curricular and instructional objectives is very useful in certain cases. It is student centered and promotes experiential English language learning.

The student is transferred to his/her world, in a situation that is helpful both linguistically as well as emotionally. This type of discourse generated helps him/her to grow and proceed in maturing both as an English learner as well as a human being, whose social and other needs are not disregarded in this approach.

Using the projects strategy in teaching English to speakers of other languages is not the best instructional method but a curricular and instructional instrument for teacher use. However, when applied at the right time and at the right place, intended learning outcomes can best be served through such an approach.

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